The Imams of The Four Schools Of Fiqh

Introduction

Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah), Imam Maalik (alaihir rahmah), Imam Shaafi (alaihir rahmah) and Imam Ahmed bin Hambal (alaihir rahmah) are the leaders of the four schools of Fiqh (Islamic Law).

"FIQH" is the Science of Islamic Law or Jurisprudence. It refers to the collection and compilation of Islamic laws based on the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of Sayyiduna Rasulullah (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam). These great Muslims devoted themselves to the task of developing the science of understanding Islamic Law and its practise.

Although they differed from each other, all the four great Imams had great respect for each other. They were all teachers and pupils of each other for the common goal of enhancing their knowledge about Islam. All of them were unanimous on Aqa'ids (Islamic Beliefs). We, as Muslims, must respect the different Sunni schools of thought.

In this present time, the Muslims are confronted by the Fitna (mischief) of the "Ghair Muqallids" or the proponents of "non-Madhabbism", that is, those who do not believe in the four Imaams. In order to warn the youth, who generally fall prey to the non-Madhabbites, the Noble Ulema have written thousands of authentic books over the last fourteen centuries in which they have explained the importance of following one of the four Imaams.

Due to the absence of such learned Ulema and scholars who can derive Islamic solutions by themselves from the Holy Quran and Hadith alone, today, it is Wajib (compulsory) for us to follow one of the four Imaams - Imaam Nu'man bin Thaabit Imaam-e- Azam Abu Hanifa, Imaam Maalik bin Anas, Imaam Muhammad bin Abu Abdullah Idrees Shafa'i and Imaam Ahmad bin Hambal (alaihir rahmah). These four Imaams are the founders of the four schools of Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), namely Hanafi, Maaliki, Shafi'i and Hambali, respectively.

It is also very important for each one of us to make Taqleed, that is, to follow our respective Imaam and act on his Ijtihad (consensus) and Fatawa (Islamic Decrees). The great Ulema have stated that those who do not follow any one of the four Imaams is Gumrah (misled) because the knowledge and spirituality of understanding the Holy Quran and Hadith in its proper context has been bestowed upon them by Almighty Allah, and such understanding and knowledge of the Holy Quran is not found in anyone today. Thus, for the Ummah to gain proper guidance and salvation, it is necessary for us to make one of them your Imaam, and to follow them. Almighty Allah says in the Quran-e-Majeed: "O People! Ask the men of knowledge if you know not". (Surah Nahl: Verse 43)

It is also not permissible for a Muslim to follow different Imaams to suite his or her own personal needs. In other words, one cannot follow Imaam-e-Shafa'i (alaihir rahmah) in one mas'ala (law) and then following Imaam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah) in another mas'ala. The proper method would be to follow one's own Imaam in all Laws of Shariah. It must also be remembered that the differences of opinion of the Imaams should not be confused with the difference of belief between the Ahle Sunnah Wa Jamaah and the other sects. The difference of opinion of the Imaams, is only in certain Masa'il-e-Far'iya (Laws of Fiqh) and not in Aqa'id-e-Asliya (Laws concerning Belief). None of the Imaams differ when it comes to Aqa'id-e-Asliya.

We make D'ua that Almighty Allah through the Wasila of Nabi Muhammad (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) grant us the Taufeeq to be steadfast on the path of the Ahle Sunnah. Ameen.

The Hanafi School Of Fiqh - Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (80 A.H. - 150 A.H.)

Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa's (alaihir rahmah) full name was Numan bin Thaabit bin Zuta bin Mah. He was born in Kufa in Iraq in 80 A.H. He belonged to the pious period of the Taabi'ins (Successors of the Sahabas).

Divine Mission

It is stated in a Hadith Shareef which Imam al-Harizmi reported from Sayyiduna Abu Hurayrah (radi Allahu anhumA) that Sayyiduna Rasoolullah (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) said: "Among my Ummah, there will come a man called Abu Hanifa. On the Day of Resurrection, he will be the light of my Ummah." Another Hadith Shareef states: "In every century, a number of my Ummah will attain to high grades. Abu Hanifa will be the highest of his time." These two Ahadith are recorded in "Durr al-Mukhtar."

Early Life

While still in his youth, he met great Sahaba like Sayyiduna Anas bin Maalik, Sayyiduna Sahl bin Saad and Sayyiduna Abul Tufail Amir bin Wathilah (radi Allahu anhumul ajma'in). Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah) was first brought up as a trader, but soon started taking deep interest in Islamic learning.

Education

He attended the lectures of Sayyiduna Hammad Basri (radi Allah anhu) in Fiqh and then began to study the Hadith. He learnt under great scholars in Kufa. In Basrah he studied under two great Taabi'ie scholars who had learnt Hadith under the Sahaba. In Makkatul Mukarammah and Madinatul Munawwarah, he learnt under Sayyiduna Ata bin Abi Rabah and Sayyiduna Ikramah (radi Allahu anhuma). In fact, Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah) had numerous teachers. Some historians say that he learnt Hadith from about 4 000 scholars.Some of his famous teachers were: Sayyiduna Imam Baaqir, Sayyiduna Imam Jafer Saadiq, Sayyiduna Ali, Sayyiduna Abu Hurayrah, Sayyiduna Abdullah ibn Umar, Sayyiduna Aqabah bin Umar, Sayyiduna Safwaan, Sayyiduna Jabir and Sayyiduna Abu Qatadah (radi Allahu anhumul ajma'in).

As A Teacher

When his teacher, Sayyiduna Hammad Basri (alaihir rahmah) passed away, Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah) was 40 years old and he began teaching. He became very famous and travelled many places. Students from all over the Muslim world came to him to listen to his lectures, interviews and debates. Imam Maalik (alaihir rahmah) also learnt under him. When he was 56 years old, Caliph Mansur came to power after the Ummayad dynasty was overthrown by the Abbasids in 132 A.H. Since Imam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah) opposed the Caliph's ruthless killing of the Ahle Bait, he was arrested. The Caliph offered the Imam the post of a Qaadi (Judge), but he refused. The Caliph Mansur had him beaten with a stick 30 strokes. His feet bled. Caliph Mansur repented and offered Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah) 30 000 pieces of silver. The great Imam refused once more. He was imprisoned again and thrashed 10 more strokes every day.

Passes Away

In the Month of Rajab 150 A.H., Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah) passed away while in Salaah. He had been poisoned by the orders of Caliph Mansur. His Janaza Salaah was performed six times and each time 50 000 people took part. People continued to come and pray for him for 20 days after he was buried. He was 70 years old. In 459 A.H. a Mazaar (Tomb) was built for him by the Seljuki ruler Alp Arsalan. He lies buried in a Tomb situated near Baghdad in Iraq.

Students

Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah) left behind about 980 students. The most famous among them being:

a. Sayyiduna Qadi Abu Yusuf (alaihir rahmah)
b. Sayyiduna Imam Muhammed (alaihir rahmah)
c. Sayyiduna Imam Zufur (alaihir rahmah)

Personality

Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah) earned his living by trading. Every Friday, he distributed 20 gold coins to the poor for his parents soul. For 40 years Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah) performed the Fajr Salaah with the Wudu that he made for the Esha Salaah (ie. he did not sleep after the night prayer). He performed Hajj 55 times. He used to recite the entire Holy Quran once every day and once every night. Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah) had so much of Taqwa (Piety) that for 30 years he fasted every day (except for the 5 forbidden days). He often read the Holy Quran in one rakaah or two. He did not accept any presents from anyone. He wore clothes like those of the poor. Imam A'zam Abu

Hanifa (alaihir rahmah) once said: "I laughed once in my life and I regret it." He talked little and thought much. It is said that at the place where his soul was taken, he read the Holy Quran 7 000 times.

The Maaliki School Of Fiqh - Imam Maalik (93 A.H. - 179 A.H.)

Imam Maalik (alaihir rahmah) was born in 93 A.H. He was born in the period of the Ummayyad Dynasty. His full name is Maalik bin Anas.

Education

Imam Maalik (radi Allahu anhu's) grandfather and uncle were great scholars of Hadith. Imam Maalik (alaihir rahmah) learnt Ahadith from his uncle, Sayyiduna Abu Suhail Nafi (alaihir rahmah). The Imam was a very keen scholar from his childhood days.

Teachers

Imam Maalik (alaihir rahmah) had many illustrious teachers. Most of them were great Taabi'i scholars who learnt under the Sahaba. Some of his teachers used to teach in Masjidun Nabawi. He learnt how to read the Holy Quran from Sayyiduna Abu Radim Nafi Abdur Rahman (alaihir rahmah).He also learnt Hadith under Sayyiduna Nafi, Sayyiduna Jafer Saadiq, Sayyiduna Mohammed bin Yahya Ansaari, Sayyiduna Abu Haashim Salmah, Sayyiduna Yahya bin Said and Sayyiduna Hishaam bin Urwah (radi Allahu anhumul ajma'in).

His Pupils

Imam Maalik (radi Allahu anhu's) fame spread far and wide and many great scholars sat in his company learning Ahadith and other Islamic legal issues. Some 1300 scholars sat at his feet. They copied the "MUWATTA" from him. The "Muwatta" is a collection of Ahadith by Imam Maalik (radi Allah anhu). Many of his pupils copied the Muwatta, the famous among them being: Sayyiduna Yahya bin Yahya Al Masmudi, Sayyiduna ibn Wahab Abu Mohammed Abdullah and Sayyiduna Abi Abdullah Abdur Rahman Abdur Rahman (radi Allahu anhumul ajma'in).

As A Teacher

Even Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah), his teacher, held Imam Maalik (alaihir rahmah) in great regard and respect and should sit in his study circle. Imam Maalik (alaihir rahmah) liked his students to read aloud while he listened. He used to sit on a high chair with students all around taking notes.

As A Muhaddith And A Jurist

He was a great "Muhaddith" (A Scholar of Hadith). He was very careful in selecting Hadith, and after examining them thoroughly used to record it in his Muwatta.

As a Jurist, he was not afraid of giving a "Fatawa" (Legal Islamic Ruling) even if it was against the Caliph. He was once flogged for doing so.

Passes Away

He passed away on the 11th of Rabi-ul-Awwal in the year 179 A.H. He was 86 years old. Imam Maalik (alaihir rahmah) is buried in Janatul Baqi in Madinatul Munawwarah.

He never wore shoes whilst in Madinatul Munawwarah. He never sat on a horse or used the toilets in this blessed city. He always went out of the city to relieve himself. He used to kiss the old buildings and the remains of old foundations, saying that Sayyiduna Rasoolullah (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam) may have walked by, touched it or saw it. Such was his adoration for Sayyiduna Rasoolullah (sallal laahu alaihi wasallam).

The Shaafa'ee School Of Fiqh - Imam Shaafa'ee (150 A.H. - 204 A.H.)

Mohammed bin Idris Al Shaafa'ee (alaihir rahmah) famously known as Imam Shaafa'ee was born in 150 A.H. and belonged to the Quraish tribe.

Early Life

When he was 10 years old, he came to Makkatul Mukarramah from Palestine where he grew up. He was very intelligent and had an excellent memory. He memorized the entire Holy Quran at the age of 7. By the age of 15, he had memorized the entire Muwatta of Imam Maalik (alaihir rahmah). Before the age of 20, he studied Islamic Jurisprudence under the Mufti of Makkatul Mukarramah, Sayyiduna Muslim bin Khalil al Zanji and also Sayyiduna Sufyaan bin Uyayana (radi Allahu anhuma). Imam Maalik bin Anas (alaihir rahmah) was also his teacher.

In Iraq

When the Governor of Iraq visited Madinatul Munawwarah, he was so impressed by Imam Shaafa'ee (alaihir rahmah) that he persuaded him to become an Administrator. As Imam Shaafa'ee (alaihir rahmah) was in conflict with the Government officials, he was deported to Iraq and brought in front of Haroun Rasheed who was very impressed with Imam Shaafa'ee (alaihir rahmah).He now studied Islamic Jurisprudence under Imam Mohammed Ash Shaybaani (alaihir rahmah), who was the student of Imam Abu Yusuf (alaihir rahmah), who was the student of Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa (alaihir rahmah). Thus, Imam Shaafa'ee (alaihir rahmah) became a master of both the Hanafi and Shaafa'ee School of Fiqh.

In Egypt

On his way to Egypt, he lectured in Makkatul Mukarramah in the Haram Shareef. Imam Ahmed bin Hambal (alaihir rahmah), who was studying at the time in Makkatul Mukarramah found great benefit from these lectures. Imam Shaafa'ee (alaihir rahmah) then went to Baghdad where he spent 3 or 4 years and finally went to Egypt. He was now 50 years old.

In Egypt, scholars from all over the world came to study at his feet. His famous pupils were Sayyiduna Rabi bin Sulayman, Sayyiduna Abu Yacoob Al Ruwayta and Sayyiduna Abu Ebraheem bin Yahya Al Muzani (radi Allahu anhumul ajma'in).

His Works

"Kitaabul Umm" and "Ar Risaalah" are the two famous books on Islamic Fiqh written by him.

Passes Away

Some reports say that he was injured seriously by a person called Fityan, while other reports mention that he passed away through natural illness on the last day of Rajab in the year 204 A.H.in Egypt. Maalik Al Kaamil, the Ayyubid Sultan, built a Mazaar for him in 608 A.H.

The Hambali School Of Fiqh - Imam Ahmed Bin Hambal (164 A.H. - 241 A.H.)

Imam Abu Abdullah Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Hambal (alaihir rahmah) was born in Marw on the 20th of Rabi-ul-Awwal 164 A.H.

Early Life

His father, Sayyiduna Mohammed (alaihir rahmah) was a warrior (Mujaahid) and lived in Basrah, Iraq. Imam Ahmed bin Hambal (alaihir rahmah) was a very intelligent child, keenly interested in furthering his Islamic education. At the age of 16, he began studying Hadith literature. It is said that he learnt almost a million Ahadith by heart. He became a famous Jurist.

His Teachers

Some of his teachers were Imam Shaafa'ee, Sayyiduna Bishar bin Al Mufaddal, Sayyiduna Ismail bin Ulayyah, Sayyiduna Jarir bin Abdul Hamid and Sayyiduna Yahya bin Said (radi Allahu anhumul ajma'in).

The great compilers of Ahadith, Imam Bukhaari and Imam Muslim (radi Allahu anhuma), including his teacher, Imam Shaafa'ee (alaihir rahmah), have also reported Hadith from him. Imam Shaafa'ee (alaihir rahmah), in spite of being the most learned in his time, used to refer to Imam Ahmed bin Hambal (alaihir rahmah) about certain Ahadith.

His Pupils

Amongst his pupils, the most famous were Sayyiduna Abu Bakr Al Alhram, Sayyiduna Hambal bin Ishaaq and Sayyiduna Abul Qasim Al Baghwi (radi Allahu anhumul ajma'in).

His Piety

Imam Ahmed bin Hambal (alaihir rahmah) was a very pious scholar who devoted all his life in the Science of Ahadith and Fiqh. He refused to eat in anyone's house who held a Governmental post. Being extremely poor with no food to eat at times, he used to still refuse to accept charity saying that he had full faith in Almighty Allah.

His Works

The most famous among his books are: Kitaabul A'maal, Kitaabut Tafseer, Kitaabul Naasikh wal Mansookh, Kitaabul Zahid, Kitaabul Masaa'il, Kitaabul Fadaa'il and Kitaabul Mansiq.

His most famous book is his "MUSNAD", a kitab in which he collected about 50 000 to 70 000 Ahadith.

Imprisonment

Imam Ahmed bin Hambal (alaihir rahmah), in the later years of his life, was imprisoned and tortured by the ruthless rulers who went against him due to their un-Islamic beliefs and practises. Caliph Mutasim billah forced the Imam to accept the beliefs of the "Mu'tazalis" (a corrupt sect), but he refused, and was beaten to such a degree that his joints were dislocated. He was kept in heavy chains for 30 months in a prison in Baghdad. He still refused to accept the beliefs of the corrupt Mu'tazali Sect and was again beaten till he fell unconscious.

Passes Away

On the 25th of Ramadaan in the year 221 A.H., Caliph Mutasim, in fear of the sin he committed, repented and set the Imam free. Imam Ahmed bin Hambal (alaihir rahmah) forgave all the people except the Mutazalis. He passed away in the year 241 A.H.